

The Need for the Knowledge of Deen

Dr. Mohammed Sadiq

There is a tendency among the western educated Muslims, who have not had an opportunity or have not made any serious efforts to acquire knowledge about their faith, to blame 'Ulama squarely for everything.

There are various schools of thought and theories, right and wrong, in all fields of knowledge. We take the responsibility to study these theories, weigh them against our knowledge base of the entire field and determine what exactly the theory propagates, and what is the intent and goals of the theorist. But, when it comes to our faith, we are handicapped due to a lack of knowledge to follow this same process.

Most of us have not put a serious effort in learning even the basics of our faith - what is the purpose and ultimate goal of it, why do we have to follow it, what is the purpose of sending prophets and revealing upon them the scriptures, what is the purpose of our life here, how are we to utilize the guidance that we received from the holy Book through the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and through his Companions and followers, what is the purpose of Shari'ah, how many aspects of faith there are, etc. etc.

Those of us who, after finishing our 'degrees', find it unavoidable to acquire some knowledge of deen, tend to make very superficial attempts at it, such as, acquiring information about it through the internet (which, by the way, is the most dangerous place to learn about Islam), or through reading the translations of the holy Qur'an (which again gets very confusing because each translation presents a slightly different view of the true meaning of the holy Book), and through reading translations of the book of Ahadith (and tell me how confusing that could be for an untrained person in the knowledge of Hadith).

Armed with this superficial knowledge, we begin to discuss and argue about various aspects of deen, which serves only to further confuse everyone involved.

Then, we look at 'Ulamas for answers. The fact is that in all areas of knowledge there are professionals who are very good, very skilled and experienced, and who possess a very deep and broad perspective of the field; and then there are those

who have taken their diplomas and degrees through correspondence and through internet, or who have gone to a fast track programs to complete their degrees. The same thing is true for the 'Ulamas of today. When we need doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., we look for the ones who are properly qualified and who possess broad knowledge, experience and skills in their field. But, when we need 'Ulamas, we tend to look for the one who would give us the answer we are looking for, without ever considering how did this person become an 'Aalim.

Obviously then, it becomes easy to blame all 'Ulama and make them the black sheeps of our communities, rather than taking some personal responsibility to first put some serious effort in learning proper deen from properly qualified teachers and recognized institutions, or in the least make an effort to find the properly qualified and experienced 'Ulama who possess the deep knowledge of all aspects of the deen from a very broad perspective. But then again, we are handicapped in this area too. How many of us truly know what are the proper qualifications for an 'Aalim? Many of us would readily know what are the most famous universities in the world in different areas of studies and specialties, but how many of us honestly know what and where are some of the institutions who specialize in training 'Ulama. How many of us know that the traditional and well-known course of study for an 'Aalim takes seven full years of studies?

As I said, we must take our lack of knowledge in our faith very seriously and, as Muslims, make a serious attempt to learn at least the fundamentals of our deen, which, by the way, is obligatory on all Muslims. On the day of judgment, we won't be held accountable for not having obtained any degrees in psychology, medicine, etc., but we will be held accountable for failing to obtain the necessary and required knowledge of our deen.

I pray to Allah (swt) to grant me and all of us the wisdom to recognize and acknowledge our short-comings with respect to the knowledge of our faith, and to make a sincere effort to acquire it.